

[0068] The system and method enables the Receiver party to receive compensation for granting others the right to transmit communication to an account, mailbox, or address associated with the Receiver party (whether or not the Receiver party responds to the Caller's transmission or communications), to profit from their fame or knowledge in a unique or additional means, to offer access to those Caller parties with sufficient interest or finances to pay for the right to transmit communication, to generate revenue to cover the associated costs of communicating with others, to develop and to address those Caller parties interested in the Receiver, to offer a public means by which the public may access them, and to receive communication or information they may not otherwise receive.

[0069] The Receiver Party also benefits by reducing the amount of junk email or unwanted email in his or her email in box, mail server, or email account.

[0070] The general public benefits from gaining access to persons whom the public might otherwise not be able to access, from organization of a market, from facilitating communication, from increased communication, from the opportunity or method to make potentially smaller transactions or transfers, and from introducing a system or method that addresses and improves current market failure in directing communication to other parties, market inefficiency due to high transaction costs, and market disorganization due to a lack of information or structure.

[0071] The system and method of the present invention provide a framework for facilitating smaller transactions and thereby increase the amount of desirable communications or transactions, decrease overall costs, improve the quality and amount of information available, provide incentive for more parties to participate or communicate, and provide value to society.

[0072] In the preferred embodiment of the system and method, the merchant web site can organize, formalize, or facilitate a market for transmission or direction of electronic communication for a fee or cost, improve information services or transfer between unassociated parties, organize or funnel demand for transmitting communication to a particular Receiver party, more efficiently process and authorize financial transactions of smaller amounts between unassociated parties, more efficiently process and organize communication to a specific Receiver party, and more efficiently process and account for fees, expenditures, and compensation.

[0073] There are likely significant economies of scale to be realized in the formation and development of large centralized communication transmission services as disclosed in the present invention. If these economies of scale prove correct, then the method and system will facilitate increased communication, increase knowledge, decrease costs, and enable parties to learn or hear things that they would not otherwise know or hear. For example, it is likely that a significant majority of famous or publicly renown persons could not operate individual network

sites which involve payment or compensation and have those businesses prosper because of the high overhead costs and market inefficiencies of small or diffuse sites.

[0074] Additionally, Caller parties or Fans are entitled to feel that they have received something tangible or of value for their funds. This problem can be addressed by providing an additional benefit or consideration in return for the Caller's paying for the right to transmit or direct communication. For example, the Merchant Intermediary could also generate a response or an authenticated unique response to the Caller party that will in some way have value as a collectible or other good or material to the Caller party. The return communication could be a graphic, photo, electronic signature, uniquely modified communication, or other transmission or communication that supplies a value in return for the Caller's payment of a fee or cost even in situation where the Receiver party does not personally read or return personalized communication to the Caller party.

[0075] The system and method of the present invention is more valuable and useful than just a "pay-per-email" service. One real power and usefulness of the system and method is that it focuses consumer demand so that resources can be more efficiently allocated, better uses a network's ability to inform and direct, organizes markets, provides more cost-effective services, reduces transaction costs, organizes information, and funnels demand.

[0076] In the preferred embodiment, the method and system facilitates communication of all types and kinds, including

communication consisting of one or more types or kinds of text, audio, images, video, voice, graphics, or music in electronic or digital form.

[0077] The system and method is not limited to "e-mail" and has application to all areas of communication or transmission including voice, video, audio, interactive television, auctions, radio, telecommunications, paging, wireless communications, the internet, internet chat, two-way cable service, broadcasting, and satellite communications. The system and method have application whenever 2 or more devices or means directly or indirectly communicate or transfer data by means of a network, through transmissions, or through an intermediary device or means.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE SEVERAL VIEWS OF THE DRAWING

[0078] These and other features and advantages of the invention will now be described with reference to the drawings of certain preferred embodiments, which are intended to illustrate and not to limit the invention, and in which:

[0079] FIG. 1 is a high-level architectural drawing illustrating the primary components of a system that operates in accordance with the present invention.

[0080] FIG. 2 is an architectural drawing and flow diagram illustrating the network presence site or location of the Merchant Inter-mediary and illustrating the steps or processes of the method.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

[0081] There are many ways to implement the method or system for enabling, organizing, facilitating, and transacting the transmission or direction of communication for a fee or cost utilizing a network such as the Internet.

[0082] More specifically, in the preferred embodiment of the present invention that utilizes a web-based email paradigm, the method provides a system and method to enable parties in the general public with network access 103 in Fig. 1 to visit the

network presence site (or "server") or address ("URL" or "Uniform Resource Locator") of a Merchant Intermediary 105.

[0083] The method and system assumes that Caller parties, Receiver parties, Merchant Intermediaries, and other parties have network access through means such as, for example, an Internet service provider (ISP), wireless, cable modem, telephone, backbone provider, or other means or ways to access a network such as the Internet.

[0084] The preferred embodiment of the system and method also assumes that the Receiver parties and the Caller parties have traditional email accounts services and addresses which are serviced by traditional e-mail servers, destination mail servers, submission mail servers, or other means.

[0085] The incorporated drawings and figures do not show or describe the type or kind of network access. The incorporated drawings and figures also do not show or demonstrate the type or kind of traditional mail servers that the system and method assumes that the Receiver or Caller parties have because traditional mail servers are not required in the preferred embodiment of the system and method. The type is not essential.

[0086] The Merchant Intermediary 105 in Fig. 1 establishes and maintains a network server or web site that is located on a "host" or "networked" computer with network access 103. In the preferred embodiment, a Caller party 101 in Fig. 1 accesses the Merchant Intermediary's server or web site via the Caller's home, office, or remote Computer or device 101 using the Caller party's

network 103 or Internet access and a conventional Web browser or e-mail client such as Eudora or Outlook which communicates with the Merchant Intermediary's network server or Web site using HTTP, e-mail, or other standards or protocols.

[0087] In the preferred embodiment, the Merchant Intermediary's web site or specialized pages within the Merchant Intermediary's web site may also be accessed by or through third party web sites, Internet portals, associated networks, search engines, other devices, or other means, services, locations, entities, or references.

[0088] Once the Caller party's computer transmits a request for information to the Merchant Intermediary's server, the Merchant Intermediary's server will respond and transmit information back to the Caller party's computer or device that displays on the computer screen of the Caller's computer or device. In the preferred embodiment of the present invention, the Merchant Intermediary's network site or server computer can transmit data that will display on the Caller's computer or device as hypertext, a linked list of the Receiver party's names and associations, a database or search function that enables the Caller to query the host's database and to match the Caller-supplied references with references in the Merchant Intermediary's database, a frame or other format, as data in the Merchant Intermediary's database in a hypertext or linked alphabetical manner, or a combination of these or other types or forms of data or display.

[0089] In the preferred embodiment, the names or associations of Receiver parties 107 are hypertext or linked on the Merchant Intermediary's web site to enable the Caller 101 to "click" on a name or reference of a Receiver party on the Merchant Intermediary's web site 105 and to receive information related to that Receiver party. Using current protocols, a Caller's "click" on the hypertext link on the Merchant Intermediary's web site causes the Caller's Web browser to transmit the associated URL on the Internet via a standard HTTP message to the Merchant Intermediary's server (or a third party's server) that access HTML documents on the Merchant Intermediary's server (or a third party's server) and transmits information back to the Caller party's computer for display in the browser or other program or application on the Caller's computer screen.

[0090] In the preferred embodiment of the system and method of the present invention, the Caller party 101 then searches or finds on the Merchant Intermediary's server 105 the Receiver party's address, account, location, electronic mailbox address, or other information required to access a Receiver party 107 or required to transmit or direct communication to the Receiver party's associated accounts, addresses, or electronic mailboxes.

[0091] The searching or finding function or feature on the Merchant Intermediary's web site or network presence 105 can be implemented in a number of ways, including a searchable database, an alphabetical listing of Receiver party's names or associations, a graphic interface of images, a display including

clickable hypertext, a hierarchical menu of references, or other database, search, organization, finding, or display forms, types, or programs.

[0092] When the Caller has found the Receiver party's name, address, or reference on the Merchant Intermediary's web site or network presence 105, the Caller party 101 learns that a Receiver party 107 has agreed to participate or to receive communications for a fee or cost and under or contingent to certain conditions, prices, fees, costs, consideration, obligations, terms, agreements, or other variables that are listed or incorporated with the listing, name, or reference. A Caller party 101 can compare terms, conditions, prices, and variables within the different services or rights that a single Receiver party 107 posts or offers or a Caller party may compare the terms, conditions, prices, and variables that different Receiver parties offer or post.

[0093] Under specific or unusual circumstances, a Caller party 101 in Fig. 1 may propose through the Merchant Intermediary 105 to a Receiver party 107 different terms, conditions, prices, or variables than those that a Receiver party has posted or offered. The Receiver party 107 can then accept, counter-offer, ignore, or reject the proposal. Most often, in the preferred embodiment, the Caller party 101 will choose to acquire the right to transmit or direct communication to a Receiver party 107 based on the price offered or posted by a Receiver party on the Merchant Intermediary's web site 105.

[0094] The Caller party 101 then clicks on or otherwise chooses a service or communication that the Caller party desires from the range of choices posted on the Merchant Intermediary's web site or network presence 105. The Caller party's choice or action also forms a legally binding agreement between the various parties, prompts an additional request to form a legal agreement, establishes the terms and conditions of the use and transaction, or otherwise establishes a contract or agreed upon terms and conditions that govern the arrangement or transaction.

[0095] In the preferred embodiment, after the Caller party 101 chooses the specific service, rights, and corresponding agreement, the Caller party may then compose, incorporate, edit, format, create or otherwise work on or with a communication intended for the Receiver party 107 using functionality supplied or provided by the Merchant Intermediary 105 on its web site. The order and form that these steps listed in paragraphs 89 through 111 of this Specification are taken or made is not essential and these steps may be performed in different orders, simultaneously, in different windows, or in other forms, orders, or actions.

[0096] The functionality that the Merchant Intermediary 105 provides that enables a Caller party 101 to compose, incorporate, edit, paste, create, send, format or otherwise work on or with a communication to the Receiver party 107 can be accomplished in many ways.

[0097] For example, in the preferred embodiment the communication can be composed, edited, formatted, created, sent,

or pasted by many means or in many ways including a message being composed as a standard e-mail communication by the Caller party's client or e-mail application and sent to the web-based mail server associated with the Merchant Intermediary, typed in as text in a form on the Merchant Intermediary's web site or network presence, pasted in and formatted as a text message on the Merchant Intermediary's web-based mail server, entered as text in a java applet, transmitted to the Merchant Intermediary as a MIME compliant message, forwarded to the Merchant Intermediary as an e-mail message, created as a HTML page, imported or edited or composed as a graphic, spoken as voice or audio, or composed, edited, formatted, or otherwise created or worked on as a combination of these or other forms, formats, or types.

[0098] The composition/editing/formatting function can be accomplished in a number of ways including as a simple text input function or means in a client-server paradigm, as a word processing application, incorporated or imported from or as part of a Caller party's existing application, client or browser software, as a java applet or similar application, as a form in HTML page, as a text input means or form on the Merchant Intermediary's web site or network presence, as a graphics program, as a mail program or server on the Merchant Intermediary's web site or network presence, or as a combination of these or other means, programs, implementations, applications, or functionality. Many web-based mail servers use a traditional-

web browser and a text input form to enable users to input text, addresses, or a message on a web site server.

[0099] The transmission, direction, sending, or forwarding function can be accomplished in a number of ways including a communication being received or forwarded with or from a Caller party's existing client or browser software, with a java applet or similar application working with the Merchant Intermediary's web site or network presence, with or form a mail program or server, or with or form a combination of these or other means, programs, implementations, applications, or functionality.

[0100] After composing, creating, formatting, editing, or otherwise working on or with the communication, the Caller party agrees to pay a fee or bear a cost before the Caller party is allowed to transmit or to direct the communication to the account, address, mailbox, location or storage area associated with the desired Receiver party.

[0101] The web site or network presence of the Merchant Intermediary 105 queries the Caller party 101 via the network 103 for information needed to transact or process payment or identify the Caller party. The web site or network presence of the Merchant Intermediary 105 establishes or consults an account for identification and processing payment with respect to the Caller party 101 and requests and receives the needed or desired information from the Caller party that is required for the Merchant Intermediary 105 to transact or to process payment.

After the Merchant Intermediary 105 has either established an

account for the Caller party 101 or found the Caller Party's pre-existing account, the Merchant Intermediary then begins to process payment, authorize transactions, bill or query the Caller party's or a third party's account or obligation or subscription for payment or verification or credit.

[0102] In the preferred embodiment of the system and method, the Merchant Intermediary 105 can receive money, payment, or consideration in any number of forms, currencies, or means including credit card payments, electronic bill payments, payment from third parties that sponsor or pay for a Caller party's transactions, advertising fees, subscription fees, third party payments, other payments, fees, or benefits, or any combination of these or other forms, benefits, or consideration.

[0103] In the preferred embodiment of the present invention's system and method, the Merchant Intermediary's program on the web server will use automated processes to process transactions, to gather information, to establish accounts, to transfer funds, to verify or to authorize transactions, to bill Caller party's accounts, to transact business, to account for fees, to receive funds, or otherwise to process and to account for financial or business transactions. For example, financial transaction programs using encryption or security features on the Merchant Intermediary's network presence can request the payment and processing information from the Caller party 101, consult using a network 103 such as the Internet with credit card companies or other financial institutions to authorize transactions and

process payment, receive and account for fees, and otherwise act with and by automated processes and automated programs. There are many automated programs and methods and security means and encryption schemes that currently utilize a network to process credit card transactions, authorize payment, check for fraud, and authorize financial transactions.

[0104] After paying a fee or bearing a cost, the Caller party 101 then orders or indicates on the Merchant Intermediary's network presence that the Caller party's wants his or her communication to be sent, transmitted, or directed to the Receiver's party's "electronic mailbox", address, account, or other location or storage area.

[0105] Alternatively in a less preferred embodiment, the Receiver Party will charge the Caller Party at some point after the Caller Party has sent the information and the Receiver Party has received the information. Although this embodiment has some significant disadvantages, the invention and method is flexible enough to consider and include this alternative in those events where the Receiver Party chooses to charge caller or sender call only after receipt of the message, information, or text. In this embodiment before the Caller Party pays, the Merchant Intermediary provides the Caller Party with the appropriate information or address that will allow the Caller party to transmit a communication to the account, mailbox, or address of the Receiver party. At some point after the information is transmitted and received by the Receiver Party, then the Receiver

Party either individually or requests the Merchant Intermediary to charge the Caller Party a fee, costs, or other charge.

[0106] The communication, e-mail, or mailbox function of the present invention's system or method can be accomplished in many ways. The preferred method of the communication, e-mail, or mailbox function of the system and method is using a modified version of a web-based mail or e-mail server.

[0107] In the preferred embodiment of the invention in Fig.1, the Merchant Intermediary's 105 web-based e-mail server establishes new and unique addresses and accounts for the Receiver party 107 that are separate and different from any other or existing e-mail addresses or communication accounts, addresses, locations, or mail-boxes that a Receiver party may have as part of using pre-existing traditional e-mail or other communication.

[0108] In the preferred embodiment of the present system and method, the Receiver's party's "electronic mailbox", address, account, or other location or storage area can be located on the Merchant Intermediary's server or located on another server or destination, account, or address associated with the desired Receiver party. Alternative embodiments of the system and method can make use of the Receiver party's pre-existing electronic mailboxes, accounts, e-mail address, or other locations, if any.

[0109] If the Receiver party's "mailbox" account is stored on the Merchant Intermediary's web site, the Caller party's

communication is held in the Receiver's party's mailbox or account. In this case, the completed communication may not be initially transmitted to another server or sent utilizing a network 103. The communication may be simply directed for storage to the Receiver party's account on the Merchant Intermediary's web site where it is stored for retrieval by the Receiver party.

[0110] Should the Receiver party 107 in Fig. 1 ask the Merchant Intermediary 105 to physically print out and mail the communications received in the account associated with the Receiver party, (for example by sending the communications via the United State Postal Service or other physical means), the completed communication may never be transmitted or transmitted over a network 103 to the Receiver party. In that case, the system and method utilize a network 103 when the Caller party 101 accesses the Merchant Intermediary's 105 web site. The system and method utilize a network 103 as the Caller party 101 is composing or sending or transmitting the communication to the Merchant Intermediary 105.

[0111] In some less preferred embodiment of the present invention and method, the Caller party 101 can using a telephone or voice communication network 103, call into the Merchant Intermediary's 105 network presence on a voice communication network and leave a voice, audio, text, or other message for the Receiver party 107. In that embodiment, the Caller party's communication is directed to the Receiver party's account or

mailbox and the Caller party 101 utilizes the voice communication or telephone network 103 to access the Merchant Intermediary 105.

[0112] Utilizing a network 103 at some stage of the system or method is critical to the present invention. A network 103, as in Fig.1, in some form is used in all embodiments of the present invention whether in situations where a network 103 is used when a Caller party's completed communication is initially or immediately transmitted to another server via a network or not. In situations where a Caller party's completed communication is initially or immediately directed for storage on the Merchant Intermediary's host computer, web-site, or mail server, the completed communication is not transmitted over or by a network 103 but the Caller Party 101 uses a network 103 to initially compose or transmit the communication to the Merchant Intermediary 105.

[0113] The present invention's system and method always make use of or utilize a network 103 such as the Internet. Even in the case where a Caller party 101 completes his communication on the Merchant Intermediary's 105 web-based server and that communication is physically mailed to the Receiver party 107 and is not transmitted to a Receiver party over a network 103, the present invention's system and method still utilizes a network 103 when the Caller party accesses the Merchant Intermediary's web site or network presence. The exact use or timing of use or utilization of the network 103 is not essential. The method and invention can make use of the network 103 in communication or

transmission involving the Caller party or the Receiver party or both.

[0114] A less preferred embodiment uses a web-based server that utilizes the Caller Parties and Receiver Parties' existing mailboxes, addresses, or accounts.

[0115] A less preferred embodiment of the present invention uses a traditional mail server.

[0116] In the less preferred embodiment that utilizes a traditional mail server, the advantage is that the Receiver Party can maintain the same email address. The less preferred embodiment has particular benefits in preventing junk email, spam, or similar unsolicited or undesired email or other communication from reaching either the incoming mail server or from reaching the user's inbox without prior payment of a fee or cost. In this less preferred embodiment, In this less preferred embodiment, the Merchant Intermediary, internet access provider, email gateway, or similar entity or provider of the system and the method can be positioned at such a point as the incoming communication may first enter into the system and method before reaching the Receiver Party's destination mail server or alternatively the system and method can be positioned so that once the incoming mail reaches the mail server, the system and method can then act upon it. The system and method will function in either position or in other positions as well depending on the specific desires and choices of the Receiver Party, the system administrator or the internet access provider. In any case, after

the communication's header indicates an email destination, the system and method check its database to determine if the Receiver Party associated with that address or account has decided to make use of the method and system. If the Receiver Party has chosen to make use of the method and system, then the Receiver Party's name, account, or address is in the Merchant Intermediary's or the system or method's database as a Receiver Party who desires a fee or cost be borne by the Caller Party. At this point, the system or method or the Merchant Intermediary sends a reply or other communication back to the address listed as the Caller Party's address or the originating party's address. This reply communication notifies the Caller Party that the Receiver Party requests a fee or cost be borne by the Caller Party in order to access the Receiver Party.

[0117] If the communication was "junk email" with an incorrect or unauthenticated originating or reply address, then likely the Caller Party will not receive the system and method's reply communication and the original communication will either sit in the system and method or the Merchant Intermediary, be returned in full to the initiating Caller party, or otherwise deleted. Alternatively, the Receiver Party can either secretly or openly, request that these communications be provided to the Receiver Party. But in most cases, where the email is authenticate and not spam, the Receiver Party, will receive from the system and method or the Merchant Intermediary an email requesting that the Caller Party pay a fee or bear a cost. The

Caller Party will then in most cases be directed to a web site where either the Caller Party can access the Caller Party's existing account or payment information or establish a new account or payment information and identifier. Once the Caller Party has provided the system and method or the Merchant Intermediary with the required information, then the System and method will process the fee transaction, generate a code or identifier that signals the system and method or Merchant Intermediary to pass the existing email to the Receiver Party's mail server, email account, or in-box, depending on where the system and method and Merchant Intermediary are deployed. After that, the system and method will generate a payment accounting for the Receiver Party and in most cases generate an invoice to both the Receiver Party and to the Caller Party to memorialize the transaction.

[0118] There are many different ways to deploy the system and method or utilize the Merchant Intermediary in the traditional mail server situation using 'existing' email accounts or addresses, and the means and examples herein provided simply attempt to illustrate possible deployments, uses, or examples.

[0119] In general, to send e-mail via a mail server, a Caller party needs to have a computer or device with a connection to a network such as the Internet and access to a mail server that can transmit the Caller party's e-mail over a network such as the Internet. A Caller party also needs the address of the Receiver party.

[0120] Finding the electronic address or location of a Receiver party 107 is often not easy and often not a trivial matter. Many search engines and directories exist to attempt to provide such information. The present invention will provide a significant advantage over many of these existing paradigms because individuals will have financial incentive to provide an address through the present invention which will then be available for public Caller party to assess and use for a fee or cost.

[0121] Traditionally, when a Caller party sends an e-mail message utilizing a traditional client-server SMTP mail server, the Caller party composes the communication on his home or business computer using an e-mail program or client and adds the Receiver party's email address. When the Caller party has completed and addressed the communication, the Caller party accesses the network such as the Internet and then directs the client or e-mail program to access the mail server or host that has a network connection. The e-mail client or program passes the communication from the Caller party's computer through the modem or telephone lines to the traditional mail server computer which often uses a protocol known as a SMTP (Simple Mail Transfer Protocol). The SMTP mail server looks at the Caller party's message for the Receiver party's e-mail address, and then transmits the Caller party's message over the Internet to the

destination mail server associated with the address of the Receiver party's mailbox.

[0122] When it is received, the e-mail is often stored in an electronic mailbox associated with the Receiver party on the destination mail server until the Receiver party retrieves it.

[0123] In the embodiment of the system and method wherein the system and method are deployed in a position between the internet and the destination mail server, the system and method will receive the communication before the destination mail server does. At this point, the system and method can check a database to determine if the Receiver Party's email address or account is one that participates in the system and method. If the Receiver Party and the associated email account and address is one that has already enrolled in the system and method and thereby chooses to require the Caller Party to bear a cost or pay a fee prior to allowing access to the Receiver Party, then the system and method can do several things. At this point, the system and method can check the Caller Party's address against a database to determine if the Caller Party is one who already participates in the system and method. If the Caller Party already is a participant, the Caller Party may have already provided instructions to the system and method about how to handle the transaction. For example, where both the Receiver party and the Caller party are enrolled, the Caller Party could have instructed the system and method or Merchant Intermediary to accept to pay for all emails to the

Receiver Party's address with or without a limit on the maximum fee per email, or alternatively the Caller Party agrees to pay for all emails that are each less than thirty five cents each , or alternatively the Caller Party could have initiated and chosen any number of variables or scenarios that are possible so as to anticipate acceptable terms and to make an agreement between the parties. If the system and method has sufficient information and agreement from both parties, then the email could be automatically transferred to the Receiver Party, the Caller Party automatically billed the fees, the Receiver Party automatically credited with the amount due him, and the financial and other information accounted for. In that case, the Caller's email will arrive in the Receiver Party's email account or in-box automatically and very quickly.

[0124] In the event that the Caller Party is not already listed in the database as a participant, then the system and method will query the Caller Party for more information and provide information to the Caller Party that the Receiver Party requires a fee or the bearing of a cost in order to accept the transmission or access the account. Most often, this will be done by the system and method automatically generating a reply to the Caller Party via the internet that reaches the Caller party's destination mail server, informing the Caller Party of the details or requirements as established by the Caller Party.

[0125] In the event that the email was spam, junk email, or had a forged or inauthentic reply address or other information, then likely the system and method's query of the Caller Party will be "bounced back" or returned as being an invalid address. At such time, the requirements and choices that the Receiver Party has established for the treatment of communication with inauthentic return, reply, or destination email addresses will determine how the communication is treated. Most often the junk email or spam will be deleted prior to, in this embodiment, ever reaching the Receiver Party's destination mail server.

[0126] Other embodiments place the system and method behind the destination mail server, such that the mail is received by the destination mail server and then the system and method queries the Caller Party. In those embodiments, the mail first reaches the destination mail server, then only thereafter reaches the system and method. In those embodiments, the system administrator or the Receiver Party will determine how to dispose of or treat communication with inauthentic reply addresses or that otherwise fail to have the replies correctly returned.

[0127] Again, the system and method are designed for maximum flexibility in order to achieve maximum useful and choice to the parties.

[0128] In general, to receive e-mail a Receiver party 107 must have an "e-mail address" which is associated with an account that is usually on a traditional or web-based mail server. The

mailbox is an address where messages sent to the Receiver party are stored until the Receiver party downloads or requests to view the messages. After a Receiver party connects to his or her mail server and enters his or her account name and password, the Receiver party can download or view the associated stored messages. On a traditional mail server, downloading the messages often transfers the messages from the mail server to the client application. On web based mail servers, the mail is often not automatically transferred but is viewed through or using the web browser. On a web-based mail server, the messages often stay on the web-based mail server until the Receiver party deletes or moves them.

[0129] Most Internet service providers (ISPs) and major online services offer a traditional e-mail address with every Internet access account. Web-based e-mail accounts are available, often for free, from a variety of web-based business including Yahoo!, Microsoft, hotmail, and others.

[0130] There are several main mail server implementations that could currently be implemented to effectuate the present invention's system and method.

[0131] The most preferable embodiment is a web-based mail server. For example, the most preferred embodiment entails a completely web based implementation of a separate web based mail server that utilizes independent mail boxes, accounts, or address that are established on a web server and accessible on the world wide web by a web browser.

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[0132] One advantage of a web-based or browser-based e-mail system is that it allows parties with on-line access and a traditional email address to have more than one mailbox, address or account. Another advantage is that web-based or browser-based e-mail system allows parties without a traditional e-mail account to participate and to receive and send email.

[0133] One disadvantage of a web-based or browser-based e-mail system is that many on-line services have proprietary or incompatible mail protocols or standards such that mail or messages may not be uniformly processed or displayed. While all or most on-line systems provide a level of commonality or communication that is standard, some features or aspects may not be uniform. Even if they trend toward uniformity, on-line systems still have the power and ability to change their adoption or implementations of their system or standards so that remaining compatible will be an on-going effort. For example, a communication containing HTML or images sent from a Yahoo.com mail subscriber to an America-Online subscriber may not display or appear to the Receiver party exactly as intended by the Caller party.

[0134] In an alternative embodiment of the present invention, a combination of web-based and traditional mail servers would provide utility and function effectively. For example, this could involve embodiments such as a web based e-mail server and retriever that in essence enables a Caller party to transmit e-mail to an account on a traditional mail server

which can be viewed by the Receiver party on a web mail viewer residing on the World Wide Web from a remote location. There are hybrids of implementations such as an independent web based WWW mail account that may be accessed by the user over the internet in multiple ways such by visiting his mail server or a world wide web site or by otherwise downloading the mail from the user's internet web based mail box to a user's traditional e-mail account or to the user's traditional e-mail client.

[0135] Less preferable alternative embodiments of the present invention utilize a traditional mail server. In the less preferred embodiments of the system and method using a traditional mail client-server application implementation, a Caller party uses mail software, called a client, to compose a message or document, possibly including tables, photographs or even a voice or video recording on his home or business computer which has access to a network such as the Internet.

[0136] Often, any information in a traditional text based mail message that is other than text must be encoded as text to be transmitted as or within a traditional mail message. There are several encoding standards such as MIME that translate the information in images, sounds, or other non-text information into text or other digital form and then retranslate them when the message is received.

[0137] Before a message is transmitted, the Caller party must address it to a specific mailbox address. For example, before sending or transmitting a traditional message or e-mail

over a network 103 such as the Internet, the Caller party must attach an Internet or network mail addresses to each message that is traditionally in the form of "Receiverparty@domainname.com".

[0138] Typically, the multipart address and domain name denotes a top-level domain (".com") following the second-level domain ("domainname") with an "@" after the individual account or address associated with the Receiver party or the Receiver party's mailbox.

[0139] Traditionally, the Caller party's computer software, using system software, standards, or protocols such as the Transmission Control Protocol (TCP), divides the message into pieces called packets and adds information to each packet about how each packet should be handled. For instance, it would tell the receiving computer or mail server information about what order packets were transmitted from the sender and how the packets should be reconstituted. The packets are typically sent from the user's home or business computer over a modem to a mail submission server, a computer on the internal network of a company or an Internet service provider.

[0140] Traditionally, a mail submission server using established protocols or standards such as SMTP converts the domain name of the recipient's mail address into a numeric Internet Protocol (IP) address. It does this by querying domain name servers interspersed throughout the Internet for the appropriate number associated with domain name. For example, the mail submission server can request from a "root" name server

information pertaining to servers with information about ".com" domains. It can then interrogate the ".com" name server for the location of the specific "domainname.com" name server. A subsequent request to the "domainname.com" server will return a communication that provides the IP address for the computer that receives the mail for domainname.com. This information is then attached to each outbound message packet.

[0141] As the packets travel across the network, routers dispersed throughout the network read the IP address on a packet and relay the packet toward the address of its destination server. Individual packets of a single divided message may travel along different routes toward their destination.

[0142] Next, in the traditional paradigm, the destination mail server receives the packets and then places the divided packets back into their intended order. The destination mail server stores the message in a mailbox or other account or location associated with the Receiver party's address or account.

[0143] As discussed, the system and method can be deployed or positioned in-between the Receiver Party's destination mail server and the internet so that the system and method receive the communication, process the communication, determine if the various parties are participants, and have the system and method act on the communication prior to the Caller Party's communication reaching the Receiver Party's destination mail server.

[0144] Lastly, the Receiver party, using a traditional mail client or other software on his home or business computer, accesses a network 103 such as the Internet for example by use of a modem. Upon request by the Receiver party, the Receiver party's client software queries the destination mail server if there is any information in the mailbox associated with the Receiver party's address or account.

[0145] In the embodiment where the system and method are positioned between the Receiver Party's destination mail server and the internet, the communication will be processed before it reached the Receiver party's destination mail server, and only those communications that satisfy the Receiver Party's criteria as previously established and pay a fee or bear a cost will pass through the system and method and into the Receiver Party's destination mail server, email account and in-box.

[0146] In those embodiments that are positioned between the Receiver Party's destination mail server and the Receiver Party's email account or in-box, the system and method or the Merchant Intermediary will process those communications after the Caller Party's communication has reached the Receiver Party's destination mail server.

[0147] Often the mail server requires that the Receiver party or client input a password or other security feature before allowing access to the account, mailbox, or address.

[0148] If there is information or mail in the Receiver party's mailbox, account or address, the Receiver party may

retrieve or download the information to the client program on his home or business computer. When the mail or information is downloaded or received by the Receiver party, then the Receiver party may read it or otherwise view it using the Receiver party's client software that displays the message.

[0149] Although it is not the preferred embodiment, the present invention and its system and method could utilize all or parts of the existing standards, protocols, and infrastructure of the traditional network mail server-client paradigm.

[0150] There are many different ways to deploy the system and method using traditional mail servers alone or a mix of hybrid elements of web sites and destination mail servers, or other automated or web based elements.

[0151] The present invention could enable a Caller party 101 with an existing e-mail account to visit the network site or web site of a Merchant Intermediary 105 to locate an account or participation of the intended Receiver party 107. After the Caller party locates on the Merchant Intermediary's network presence or web site the participation of an intended Receiver party, the Merchant Intermediary could request that the Caller party pay a fee or bear a cost in order to receive the exact information about Receiver party's address or account.

[0152] If the Caller party pays, then the Caller party receives from the Merchant Intermediary the appropriate information or address that will allow the Caller party to

transmit a communication to the account, mailbox, or address of the Receiver party.

[0153] Alternatively in a less preferred embodiment, after the Caller Party has sent the information, the Receiver Party will after receipt charge the Caller Party. Although this embodiment has some significant disadvantages, the invention and method is flexible enough to consider this alternative in those events where the Receiver Party chooses to charge caller or sender call only after receipt of the message, information, or text. In this embodiment before the Caller Party pays, the Merchant Intermediary provides the Caller Party with the appropriate information or address that will allow the Caller party to transmit a communication to the account, mailbox, or address of the Receiver party. At some point after the information is transmitted and received by the Receiver Party, then the Receiver Party either individually or requests the Merchant Intermediary to charge the Caller Party a fee, costs, or other charge.

[0154] In the preferred embodiment of this implementation, the address or account associated with the Receiver party would change dynamically or have security features so that the Caller party could only use the address or account once to transfer one message.

[0155] After the Caller party receives the address or account information, the Caller party could then use his

traditional mail client to compose, to address, and to transmit a message to the account of the Receiver party.

[0156] Other alternative and less preferred embodiments of the present invention that use the standards or protocols of the traditional mail infrastructure could be implemented in any number of ways, including ways that use the Receiver party's existing mail-box account or address.

[0157] For example, other alternative embodiments of the present system and method could use the standards or protocols of the traditional mail structure on the Merchant Intermediary's network site or WWW presence or mail server to re-mail the communication received from the Caller party to a pre-existing account or address or mailbox associated with the Receiver party which may or may not be on the Merchant Intermediary's web site or under its control.

[0158] In essence, this variation of the less preferred embodiment of the present invention's method and system would be a reverse of the anonymous re-mailer paradigm. In the anonymous re-mailer paradigm, the Caller party seeks to hide or secret his identity. In this alternative variation of the invention's system and method, the Receiver party seeks to hide the exact address and account associated with the Receiver party although the Receiver party's identity is known.

[0159] In another alternative embodiment, the system and method uses a Merchant Intermediary to perform the sending or transmission function by forwarding the e-mail or communication

to another address or location typically a web-based or traditional mail server.

[0160] One of the drawbacks of using the traditional mail infrastructure is that Caller parties' mail is usually downloaded to the client computer so that if the Caller party uses more than one computer the mail can be dispersed across computers and unavailable to view when the Caller party is not using the computer onto which he downloaded the mail.

[0161] Another drawback of the traditional mail server paradigm is that the Merchant Intermediary has more difficulty in limiting the amount of text in the Caller Party's communication while at the same time keeping that communication sensible and accurate. A traditional e-mail communication can be of great length. The traditional mail paradigm does not put a high premium or value on brevity. A web-based mail paradigm that puts a premium on brevity and limits the number of text characters allowed in a communication can better limit the extent of the Caller party's expression while still valuing the substance of the Caller 's communication.

[0162] One of the advantages of using the traditional mail server embodiment is that most users may want to keep their existing email addresses and not establish new ones. In addition, many of these users simply want to not allow spam or junk mail to reach their established accounts, but do not want to set a high price for incoming emails so as to encourage more people to email or communicate more often. These Receiver Parties may want to set

[0166] One of the disadvantages of the web based systems is that they usually require a user to procure a new and different email address.

[0167] There are several kinds of web-based mail applications. The first type of web based mail application or server lets a user with internet access read and view the mail that is in the mailbox account or address of the user's existing mail server or destination mail server. In essence, this type of application allows remote viewing of a user's e-mail from any computer with Internet access.

[0168] For purposes of the present invention and the system and method, the web based refers to any mailing system that utilizes a mixture of the protocols for transferring information between computers over a network, but present invention and the system and method is not reliant on any particular protocol, standard, or application.

[0169] These types of web-based mail applications often use CGI on the web server side and Internet standards POP, SMTP, and IMAP on the e-mail side. They usually require that a user on the World Wide Web arrive at the web site of the Web-based mail server, provide the web based application with the POP id or username associated with the user's current mail server, type in an Internet address, and then enter the user's password. The web based application can query the user's traditional mail server, either downloads or receives copies of the user's web based mail

the price for receiving or allowing a Caller Party to access their email account just high enough to discourage junk emailers but low enough to encourage legitimate advertisers to pay to send them directed advertising emails that are related to known interests of the Receiver Party.

[0163] In the most preferred embodiment of the present invention, the Merchant Intermediary implements a web-based application or mail server.

[0164] In general, Web-based refers to applications or services that are resident on a server that is accessible using a Web browser, email client, or other software on the user's computer or device with network or internet access. The Web is usually distinguished from the Internet by the WWW's use of a standard "language" or protocol which allows computers of all different makes and models to communicate with each other and share text, graphics, images, sound, and video information.

[0165] A web-based mail server allows Caller parties with access to the World Wide Web ("WWW") to send and receive mail from a Web site. Current example of Internet based WWW mail servers include hotmail and Yahoo.com's mail services. Web-based mail servers allow Caller parties to create a unique e-mail account on a Web site that the Caller party can then access by way of the Internet using a password. From within the web site, the Caller party can write, create, address, send, receive, and reply to e-mail from others. Often there is no direct fee or charge to use these Web based mail services.

server or the mail existing in the user's mailbox on the traditional mail server, and then displays the mail on the web page.

[0170] A second and more preferable type of web based mail server enables a user to establish one or more new and independent e-mail mailboxes, accounts, and addresses that are accessible from a web browser or other application running on any computer, machine, or device with access to a network or the internet (or an intranet or other network).

[0171] Usually, the user arrives at the Web based application on the WWW and establishes a new account, a new address, a new mailbox, and a new password that are independent of any existing e-mail accounts or addresses. Often called web-mail gateways, these programs can enable users to read and process new email, send and forward messages, send and view attachments, use folders to organize messages, and use most of the common features of traditional mail client programs. Some of these Web-based email applications or gateways can either automatically delete messages from the server or leave them on the server for later downloading with a normal email client package.

[0172] An independent web based mail gateway, server, or application can usually send communication to any other address on the network or the Internet. The mail is stored in electronic

mailboxes that a Receiver party accesses by entering a password and requesting to view or download the communication.

[0173] In the system and method utilizing a web-based email application or gateway, the system and method can work on the web site itself, as the Caller Party enters the information, after the Caller Party has directed the email but before it reaches the web based email destination server, or after the mail has reached the web-based email destination server and before it has reached the user's account or in-box.

[0174] The main difference between traditional e-mail server and web based mail servers, applications or gateways is that the mail on a traditional server that use POP or POP3 is usually limited to being downloaded to the client machine and therefore may be geographically dispersed if a user has more than one device, computer, or machine on which the user reads e-mail. On the web based implementation that use standard protocol such as IMAP or IMAP 4, the mail is available from any device or location with network access and remains easily accessible.

[0175] For the purposes of the present invention, a web based mail server is preferable because it allows greater integration between the locating and identifying functions of the present invention and the transmission or direction function. The system and method will best function when the searchable database of Receiver parties or other means to locate the names or references of Receiver Parties is easily accessed and used. The

WWW is now the easiest means to locate and publish this type of directory, database, or locating means. Once the Caller party has located the information associated with a Receiver party, then the Caller party may immediately begin to write a communication, pay a fee or bear a cost or obligation, and then transmit or direct the communication without having to venture to other programs or servers or locations on the network or on the Caller party's computer.

[0176] Another advantage is that this implementation can decrease the amount of communication over the Internet if the communications are stored on the Merchant Intermediary's web site. The web based email implementation cuts out the transmission from the Merchant Intermediary to the server of the Receiver Party's traditional e-mail account in situations where the Receiver Party can download or access the communication directly from the web site of the Merchant Intermediary.

[0177] A web based implementation is also preferable because in the preferred embodiment of the present invention, the Merchant Intermediary's integrated web site performs the following functions all in one series or web site: encrypts or keeps secret from the Caller party the address or location of the Receiver party's account or address, formats the Caller party's communication or transmission, transacts or processes the Caller's payment or transfers rendered, transmits or directs the Caller's communication to the account of the Receiver, and

party; delivers or stores Caller party's communication to or in the Receiver party's account, address, or mailbox for Receiver party's access; optionally processes, filters, or formats Caller's communication for easier management, organization, or viewing by Receiver party; accounts and pays for fees and costs; and compensates Receiver Parties for participation or by arrangement or for downloading the communication.

[0183] In the preferred embodiment of the present invention's system and method, the Merchant Intermediary (i) engages Receiver Parties to participate for example by providing data entry forms for establishing accounts and payment information; (ii) authenticates that the Receiver party is truly the party that the public recognizes or commonly associates with the name or association given by or to the Receiver party for by example requiring that the Receiver Party provide his social security number and address and getting a liability release from the Receiver Party so that the Receiver Party's information can be automatically cross checked against a credit report to see if the Receiver's information matches the credit report and then if it matches the information and identity of the Receiver Party is considered automatically authenticated; (iii) upon establishing an account for example provides Receiver Parties with secret or proprietary accounts, addresses, or mailboxes for placement or storage of communication if desired; (iv) organizes a network accessible searchable database or finding function which can include information detailing participating Receiver Parties as

an essential part of the system in that the Merchant Intermediary performs the method.

[0182] In the preferred embodiment of the present invention's system and method, the Merchant Intermediary engages Receiver Parties to participate; authenticates that the Receiver party is truly the party that the public recognizes or commonly associates with the name or association given by or to the Receiver party; provides Receiver Parties with secret or proprietary accounts, addresses, or mailboxes if desired; organizes a network accessible searchable database or finding function which can include information detailing participating Receiver Parties as well as communicate the price of transmitting or directing communication to a Receiver party; advertises and manages the network site or database to draw visitors and focus attention; establishes accounts for payment by Caller parties; establishes a legally binding agreement with the Caller party and between the Caller and Receiver parties; provides forum and means and common terms to publish or to negotiate terms, conditions, and variables upon which Callers and Receiver parties may agree in forming a contract, license, or agreement; provides Caller Parties with a means or form in which to communicate or transmit or direct communication to Receiver Parties; processes and receives Caller Parties payment or obligations; authorizes, processes, and accounts for financial transactions; stores, directs, or transmits the Caller party's communication to accounts, mailboxes, or addresses associated with the Receiver

accounts to and compensates the Receiver party for participating in the system or for downloading a Caller's transmitted communications all from one integrated system.

[0178] It can be easier for the Merchant Intermediary to encrypt a message or keep a Caller Parties address secret in a web-based implementation. For example, in a web-based implementation, a Caller party never has to even enter any address information into the message, it can be automatically and secretly entered so as to prevent the Caller party from knowing the Receiver party's mailbox, address, or account information.

[0179] Additionally, a web-based implementation is advantageous because it can be easier for the Merchant Intermediary to limit or to format the length of Caller party's communication because the Merchant intermediary could just use a form box with a limited amount of character space available. For example, the web based e-mail implementation could provide a 100-character form box that a Caller party is allowed to fill.

[0180] Additionally, a web-based implementation is advantageous because it can be easier, less expensive, and faster for the Merchant Intermediary to process payment on a secure web site than with some other available means, such as manual entry of credit card or financial information given orally over the phone.

[0181] The method and system utilize a Merchant Intermediary and a web site or network presence which is represented in Fig 2. A Merchant Intermediary, in some form, is

well as communicate the price of transmitting or directing communication to a Receiver party by for example organizing and displaying information and search functions in a visually appropriate and pleasing fashion; (v) advertises and manages the network site or database to draw visitors and focus attention by for example paying celebrities or others to appear in endorsements or in photos that include the name of the web site; (vi) establishes accounts for payment by Caller parties by for example requesting that Caller Parties fill out forms with information that includes their name, address, credit card numbers, and other information that may be needed or useful for processing financial transaction; (vii) establishes a legally binding agreement with the Caller party and between the Caller and Receiver parties by for example writing and displaying a standard or several form legal agreements that the Receiver Party may require a Caller Party to agree to in order to access the Receiver Party's account; (viii) provides forum and means and common terms to publish or to negotiate terms, conditions, and variables upon which Callers and Receiver parties may agree in forming a contract, license, or agreement for example by requiring a user agreement which all Caller and Receiver Parties must agree to in order to participate in the method and system; (ix) provides Caller Parties with a means or form in which to communicate or transmit or direct communication to Receiver Parties by for example providing a text box on the web site such that a Caller Party may type or paste in the text or substance

of the communication; (x) processes and receives Caller Parties payment or obligations by for example debiting the Caller Parties bank account or credit card with the funds expended; (xi) authorizes, processes, and accounts for financial transactions by for example, keeping track of the monies billed, the amounts due the Receiver Party, and providing invoices or billings statements or similar per transaction or monthly or periodic statements to all parties detailing the costs and benefits of participating; (xii) stores, directs, or transmits the Caller party's communication to accounts, mailboxes, or addresses associated with the Receiver party for example until the Receiver Party requests or retrieves the communication; (xiii) delivers or stores Caller party's communication to or in the Receiver party's account, address, or mailbox for Receiver party's access by for example in order of the time that they were received or the price paid by the Caller Party; (xiv) optionally processes, filters, or formats Caller's communication for easier management, organization, or viewing by Receiver party by for example organizing the communication by time, limiting the size of the communication, classifying the substance of the communication by comparing the words of the communication with common feeling or expressions and thereby characterizing the substance of the communication; (xv) accounts and pays for fees and costs by for example negotiating the payment of costs due; and (xvi) compensates Receiver Parties for participation or by arrangement or for downloading the communication by for example, crediting

Receiver Party's credit card or writing checks to Receiver Parties for the amounts of the monies due Receiver Parties on a periodic basis.

[0184] The Merchant Intermediary takes measures to authenticate the identity and associations of the Receiver party before any communication or payment is released to the Receiver party. The Merchant Intermediary can request bank account numbers, social security numbers, and other verification or authentication data that can be used to cross check that the Receiver Party actually is who he or she claims to be.

[0185] For example, if a person proclaiming to be "Julia Roberts" the film star seeks to secure the name "Julia Roberts" on the Merchant Intermediary's web site for purposes of charging Caller parties a fee for transmitting or directing communication to an address or account associated with the actress commonly known as "Julia Roberts", then the Merchant Intermediary may require additional information of and from the Receiver party to verify and authenticate that the person purporting to be "Julia Roberts" the film star actually is "Julia Roberts" the film star before the Merchant Intermediary accepts publication of the name, before releasing communication to the Receiver party, or before releasing funds to the Receiver party.

[0186] As illustrated in Fig.2, the Merchant Intermediary's network presence or WWW site can be implemented in many ways. The most preferred method is to implement a WWW site with a display

or graphic feature or function shown as "Display and Navigation Function" 201 in Fig.2; a search or finding feature or function shown as "Search and Organization function" 203 in Fig.2; an address location function shown as "Address Location or Identification function" 205 in Fig.2; an account establishment or verification feature or function shown as "Account Establishment or Verification function" 207 in Fig.2; an integrated addressing, direction, e-mail, text, or form input feature or function shown as "Addressing, Composition, Editing, or Formatting of Communication Function" 209 in Fig.2; a payment or processing feature or function shown as "Process Transaction, Payment and Accounting Function" 211 in Fig.2; and a message storage or transmission feature or function shown as "Message Storage or Transmission Function" 213 in Fig.2.

[0187] A preferred embodiment of the Merchant Intermediary's web site display or graphic feature or function shown as "Display and Navigation Function" 201 in Fig.2 is to utilize one or more commonly established standards or protocols such as HTML and in addition include the option of additional features using such less commonly established standards or protocols such as HTML frame format. For example, the bottom frame can be designated as the frame describing the Receiver party frame. The top frame can provide navigational controls for the Caller party to return to the Merchant Intermediary's home page or Web site. The middle frame can be used to compose a communication. This embodiment enables the Caller party to view

information about the Merchant Intermediary's web site while also viewing the frame describing information related to the Receiver party. In the preferred embodiment of the present invention, a more personalized information or page may also present information relating to the cost or price of transmitting communication to the Receiver party.

[0188] Other alternative embodiments of the graphic or display feature or function shown as "Display and Navigation Function" 201 in Fig.2 of the present system and method include a merchant web site or server which includes a controller which lists, advertises, or organizes the display or appearance of a Receiver party's availability to receive communication; lists a price for the opportunity to transmit an electronic communication; and provides Caller Parties more detailed information.

[0189] The searching or finding function or feature of the Merchant Intermediary shown as "Search and Organization function" 203 in Fig.2 can be implemented in a number of ways. On the network presence site or server of the Merchant Intermediary, the Caller party may locate the means to access the proprietary address or account of a Receiver party.

[0190] For example, when the Caller party has located on the Merchant Intermediary's web site or network presence the name of the Receiver party that he desires, the Caller party can click on the hypertext or linked name to reach a separately identifiable page, frame, or document associated with that name.